

Marianas Trench Marine National Monument Advisory Council (MTMAC) Conference Call  
December 4/5<sup>th</sup>, 2012  
1:00pm HST/ 9:00am ChST

Call to order took place at 1:20pm/9:20am after all members were able to join.

Participants confirmed:

MTMAC:	Arnold Palacios	Dr. John Joyner	Chairman Ben Sablan
	Morgan Roper	Roy Tsusui	

Agencies:

USFWS:	Susan White	Laura Beauregard	Naomi Rowden
NMFS:	Heidi Hirsh	Midori Akamine	

Dr. Joyner moved to approve the minutes from the June meeting, Morgan seconded the motion and with unanimous approval the June meeting minutes were approved. Roy discussed the meeting minutes from the September teleconference and said that they are in process of finalizing the minutes to distribute to the members for review and comment. He will send by email next week for approval at the next meeting.

#### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report out on Meeting Action Items:**

Susan reported that the Service has received no new research requests this quarter. The Monument Management Plan (MMP) is still in review between NOAA and the Service. There has been no new action and no comments on the draft goals were received from MTMAC members.

Arnold commented that NOAA communicated with them regarding research requests several meetings ago and that they had agreed on a process for how CNMI will be notified of research requests. CNMI should be apprised of research requests and activity within the Monument and EEZ and he suggested that an agreement be reached about how to approach this with the Service, a process for how CNMI will be informed. Susan agreed that the Service will keep CNMI informed of any research requests the Service receives and pointed out that the requests received earlier in the year she passed along several meetings ago. Midori added that the normal process for foreign research requests is that they go through the Department of State and a lot of people look at them and give input. NOAA decided to incorporate CNMI comments with their NOAA comments on the research proposal and send it up their chain through Department of Commerce and Department of State. Arnold reiterated that CNMI wants to be involved in the decision-making process for the research requests as it impacts them greatly.

Inquiry if there was any further communication from the Department of State regarding the Chinese request to go to Challenger Deep. There was confirmation that neither NOAA nor the Service has had any further communication on this particular research request.

At Chairman Sablan's suggestion, Susan elaborated on the MMP. The planning update document from the public scoping meetings is still under review. The Service received comments from the Department of Defense (DoD) after the June meeting but has received no further comments from the MTMAC. No further action on the planning update has happened this quarter. There was a question about the timeline for this, Susan responded that the timeline from the June meeting was still in effect, there have been no changes to that.

Arnold asked about the new proposed listing of corals as endangered species and how the MMP will address the listing. Susan and Midori both stated that the listed corals will be addressed in the MMP, as another layer of the MMP. Arnold asked whether the listed species will also be addressed in the Science Plan that NMFS is creating. Midori responded that each listed species has its own recovery plan, and then other plans, such as the Science Plan will layer over that and contribute to the recovery plan for the listed species. Arnold expressed concern about the budget and wanted to ensure that both the Science Plan and MMP take the listed coral species into account as they are developed since this will have a large impact on CNMI and the Monument. Midori said she will make a note of this and pass it along to the Science Center and also encouraged Arnold to submit written comments to that effect on the Science Plan, they are due by Friday Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>. Morgan added that the public meetings for the listing are coming up and for CNMI & Guam they are in February 2013.

#### **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service Report out on Meeting Action Items:**

Heidi gave an update on the education and outreach project, "Why Do We Explore". The Introduction to the course was held in October and had really good turnout. The goal is to expose students and teachers to the book and the course materials. The full course will take place March 22, 2013. The NOAA Office of Exploration and Research will be presenting.

Non-commercial fishing Regulations Update. Heidi said NOAA expects to receive proposed rules from WesPac Council in January 2013 and then will consult with the Service and CNMI. The process to finalize the rules will begin Spring of 2013. The regulations are for non-commercial fishing but also include a provision prohibiting commercial fishing.

Update on Visitor Center/multi-purpose facility. Heidi went over that at the last meeting Lisa had proposed another parallel process with the Service to put together a visitor center. The Agencies still need to coordinate on how the visitor center can be approached. Arnold offered that there was congressional funding for a visitor center to CNMI through the National Ocean Service and is currently being used to explore the option of a visitor center at the lighthouse. He recommends that within the 3 entities of the MTMAC there be open communication regarding any plans on this particular subject. All 3 are trying to make something happen and it is not as collaborative as it could be. He shared where CNMI is at and would like the same courtesy from both of the Agencies. Susan offered that the Service sees the visitor center as a really important issue and a big part of the MMP and Monument outreach. The Service would use the MMPlanning process to explore options and move forward with a visitor center and, and doesn't currently have any plan for a separate process. By going through the MMP, it will necessarily go through the same collaboration and consultation as the rest of the plan including working closely with the MTMAC.

Arnold recommended that this be taken up as a subject matter of particular importance to the MTMAC with regular conversations about it at each meeting. He expressed concern over different entities having different interests in the visitor center, that congressional delegates may want particular sites, and he feels that it is important for the public to be involved in the decision making process for the visitor center.

Heidi said that NOAA wants to see a visitor center happen and thinks that they can have an update on it by the next meeting. CNMI said they will hold NOAA to an update at the next call.

Laura explained that the visitor center is an integral part of the MMP and has to go through the same process, including public comment, and the Service cannot do a separate process just for the visitor center.

Arnold responded that he understands and just wants to see action on the subject, he feels each entity has resources they could contribute if there were better collaboration up-front. He wants to talk more specifically about the visitor center even if it is a committee or informal outside of the MTMAC meetings and then possibly submit to the MTMAC for approval or concurrence. He asked again about making a special project of it for the MTMAC. Susan said that she feels it is larger just the 3 entities of the MTMAC, he agreed with that, Susan committed that the Service will not move forward with developing any plans for a visitor center without working with MTMAC.

Someone asked if there was agreement that the visitor center would be located in CNMI. There was consensus that this made sense, except that Susan had to make clear it is pre-decisional before planning is complete, and that the decision would be made by the Regional Director as part of the approval of the final MMP. She added that the recommendations of the MTMAC would be given considerable weight as the Regional Director made her decision.

#### **Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands Report out on Meeting Action Items:**

Letter from the Governor. Dr. Joyner explained that the position of the Governor has not changed since 2008. The agreement made with the Bush administration is expected to continue to the next and all the data and records regarding that decision should also have been passed from one administration to the next. For the Governor to write another letter now would therefore be unnecessary and possibly futile. His position is that the MTMAC has presented the matter and each of the Federal Agencies have access to their respective Secretaries and they either already have or should be communicating the concerns to the Secretaries. Dr. Joyner then asked whether the Governor is expected to write a letter saying he wants fulfillment of the commitments made? Susan responded that the questions of the MTMAC have been submitted through the internal channels to the Secretary of the Interior. They continue to be worked on and she has had no response back. A letter directly from the Governor of CNMI would have greater weight and therefore would receive a more prompt and formal response.

Arnold wanted to clarify that at the June meeting it was the recommendation of MTMAC that the Governor communicate directly with the Secretaries? Yes, there is concurrence that this is the recommendation from the June meeting. As reported by Dr. Joyner, it is a challenge to convince the Governor of the need for this. He said they would work on drafting a letter and try to get the Governor to sign it.

Heidi offered that it is a non-traditional way to make the request for answers from the Secretary by going through the NOAA internal channels and that a letter from the Governor would get more traction. MTMAC will take that into consideration.

The issue of a letter from the Governor regarding co-management is nearly the same. There was agreement that both issues could be addressed through one letter.

#### **Other information/new issues?**

Midori shared that another office in NOAA is in the process of setting up an Ocean Exploration Advisory Board. She will send more information by email if anyone wants to apply or share with others who might

be interested. Susan asked to clarify that this is a national program and not specific to the Marianas or the Monument and Midori confirmed this is correct.

CNMI will be having workshops regarding Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) as they have new congressional funding to move forward with that. One component of the workshops is how Federal Agencies can assist in management and work with CNMI. They are looking for presenters at the workshop, it will be held Jan. 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Susan asked for the FWS to be included. Arnold will send invites to attend or present to both NOAA and the Service.

Time and Date for Next Conference Call. The date of March 19/20<sup>th</sup> was suggested. Arnold has to confirm the dates of a WesPac meeting that will also be in March to confirm whether those dates will work for him, he needed another week or so to make sure. There will be email communication to set up the next meeting date.

Motion for adjournment by Morgan, seconded by Dr. Joyner and all were in favor so the meeting was adjourned.